

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress
2nd Session

Vote No. 296

September 20, 1996, 10:02 am
Page S-11064 Temp. Record

MARITIME SECURITY ACT/Hazardous Duty Pay

SUBJECT: Maritime Security Act . . . H.R. 1350. Stevens motion to table the Grassley amendment No. 5391.

ACTION: MOTION TO TABLE AGREED TO, 77-16

SYNOPSIS: H.R. 1350, the Maritime Security Act, will establish the Maritime Security Fleet Program as a replacement for the Operational Differential Subsidy Program, which will be phased out. The new program will provide fixed annual payments to ship owners or operators in return for their agreeing to make their ships available for hire in times of national emergency or war.

The Grassley amendment would require that the hazardous duty wage scale for merchant marine seamen be commensurate with the hazardous duty pay provided to members of the uniformed services.

Debate was limited by unanimous consent. Following debate, Senator Stevens moved to table the Grassley amendment. Generally, those favoring the motion to table opposed the amendment; those opposing the motion to table favored the amendment.

Those favoring the motion to table contended:

The Grassley amendment would unfairly tie merchant mariners' war bonus pay to the war bonus pay given to the military. Active duty forces, who have volunteered to serve their country by standing in harm's way when necessary, are not given large extra sums when they are called upon to fight, but they are amply rewarded in other ways. They receive a very broad range of veterans' benefits to meet their needs after their service. Those benefits include medical care for themselves and their spouses. A merchant marine sailor, though, who is injured or killed receives nothing from the Federal Government. If our colleagues are going to equate merchant marine sailors to enlisted sailors, then they should give them the other benefits that enlisted sailors receive. Our colleagues have spoken about these commercial sailors as though they are mercenaries for receiving high bonuses. This comparison is unfair. Basically, they receive double-time when they go unarmed into a war zone where they are likely to be killed. We think that most Americans would agree that is not much of a financial incentive. Most Americans would not show up to work if they were told that

(See other side)

YEAS (77)				NAYS (16)		NOT VOTING (7)	
Republican (35 or 71%)		Democrats (42 or 95%)		Republicans (14 or 29%)	Democrats (2 or 5%)	Republicans (4)	Democrats (3)
Abraham	Hutchison	Akaka	Hollings	Ashcroft	Bumpers	Helms ⁻²	Kerry ⁻²
Bennett	Inhofe	Baucus	Inouye	Brown	Kohl	Mack ⁻²	Nunn ⁻²
Bond	Jeffords	Biden	Johnston	Coats		Roth ⁻²	Pryor ⁻²
Burns	Kempthorne	Bingaman	Kennedy	Faircloth		Thomas ⁻²	
Campbell	Lott	Boxer	Kerrey	Frahm			
Chafee	Lugar	Bradley	Lautenberg	Grams			
Cochran	McCain	Breaux	Leahy	Grassley			
Cohen	McConnell	Bryan	Levin	Gregg			
Coverdell	Murkowski	Byrd	Lieberman	Hatch			
Craig	Santorum	Conrad	Mikulski	Kassebaum			
D'Amato	Shelby	Daschle	Moseley-Braun	Kyl			
DeWine	Simpson	Dodd	Moynihan	Nickles			
Domenici	Snowe	Dorgan	Murray	Pressler			
Frist	Specter	Exon	Pell	Smith			
Gorton	Stevens	Feingold	Reid				
Gramm	Thompson	Feinstein	Robb				
Hatfield	Thurmond	Ford	Rockefeller				
	Warner	Glenn	Sarbanes				
		Graham	Simon				
		Harkin	Wellstone				
		Heflin	Wyden				

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

1—Official Business
2—Necessarily Absent
3—Illness
4—Other

SYMBOLS:

AY—Announced Yea
AN—Announced Nay
PY—Paired Yea
PN—Paired Nay

in the next couple of days, if they came to work, there would be a good chance they would be killed, but they would be paid twice as much per hour until the danger passed. Merchant sailors also do not want to be killed, and do not willingly enter war zones because of war bonus pay. Instead, they enter out of patriotism, just like enlisted men and women. During the Persian Gulf War sixteen foreign ships refused to enter the war zone because of the danger. Not one U.S. merchant mariner on any ship refused.

Even if it were fair to expect enlisted personnel and merchant mariners to receive the same level of hazardous duty pay, the United States Government has no business demanding that same level. Under the old merchant marine program, and under the new program that will be created by this bill, the payments go to the ship owners. The amount that is paid to the sailors, including bonuses, is worked out between the sailors and the owners, not the sailors and the Government.

We know that the Grassley amendment has the support of taxpayer rights groups, but they are wrong on this issue. The United States has no reason and no right to cut the hazardous duty pay for merchant mariners. We thus urge the tabling of the Grassley amendment.

Those opposing the motion to table contended:

The 104th Congress has been remarkable in many respects in cutting spending and rooting out Government waste. This bill, though, is a throwback to the old way of doing business. The current preference system for U.S. merchant shipping, under which the Government subsidizes U.S.-flag carriers and crews so that they can be competitive with foreign carriers and crews, has just led the costs for the U.S. merchant marine to skyrocket. Why not? Uncle Sam picks up the difference between their outrageous costs and the costs of competitive shippers. Most of the costs are due to the extremely high wages and benefits that are paid to merchant mariners. The shippers do not care--Uncle Sam picks up 85 percent of their pay and benefit costs, enabling them to pay, for example, an average of \$35,000 per month, not year, for a captain billet. Even President Clinton's liberal Cabinet, in a 1993 maritime decision memo it prepared, came to the conclusion that the costs of the merchant marine program are primarily due to the high pay and benefits given to commercial sailors. Over the years, Congress has put up with this situation for the most inexcusable of reasons--money. The seafarers union is extremely active in making political donations. Per member, it spends 500 times as much per union member on politics as does the AFL-CIO, which itself is no stranger to politics. Wealthy shipping companies also benefit greatly from this arrangement. Politicians get the money they need to get reelected, and in turn they support giving the taxpayers' money to merchant shippers.

The defenders of this arrangement knew that with a Republican majority in Congress this corporate and union welfare program did not have a chance of surviving without at least being radically reformed, so they have proposed this bill. One reform that they have made is to cap the amount of money that is given to each ship. This reform will leave pay and benefit decisions to be negotiated between ship owners and sailors, as our colleagues have stated. However, that base amount is given just to preserve the right to hire these U.S. merchant fleets in war time. The \$2.3 million that will be given for each ship in the program will not pay for 1 cent of their involvement in any war-zone shipping. If the United States gets in another military conflict, the way this bill is written it will have to pick up all of the shippers' costs, which will include war-zone pay. We will have the same situation in which unions will demand double-time pay, and shippers will agree, because the taxpayers will have to pay. Our colleagues tell us that merchant marines are not entering war zones for double-time pay, but because they are patriots. If they are right, then we do not need to insult these sailors who already receive extremely generous pay and benefits with the offer of double-time pay. They can get by on the same hazardous duty pay as enlisted people do.

In our opinion, this entire program is a waste of money. In the Persian Gulf War, the U.S. military hauled 80 percent of its own material, and the U.S. merchant marine hauled only 8 percent of the remainder. Further, in many cases, U.S. ships refused to go near the war zone. They brought their cargo to nearby ports and loaded it onto foreign ships that they hired to enter the Gulf. The sailors of the merchant marine receive extremely high salaries because they are subsidized by the taxpayers to make sure that we have some guaranteed domestic shipping capability in the event of war. They do not deserve also to get larger bonuses during war than do enlisted personnel. We therefore strongly oppose the motion to table the Grassley amendment.